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STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ANGLICAN CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL AND CHAIR OF THE NGO COMMITTEE ON THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

1. In November 1991, the Conference of Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council recognized the NGO Committee on the International Year for the World's Indigenous People. The Committee seeks to strengthen the developing relationship between the United Nations system and indigenous peoples.

2. In March 1992, the Committee sponsored a day-long seminar that was attended by over 70 delegates representing many thousands of indigenous people from all over the world. That meeting produced a strong statement of the expectations of indigenous peoples, which was then submitted to the technical meeting called for in General Assembly resolution 46/128, which was held at Geneva from 9 to 12 March.

3. In decision 1991/7 (E/ICEF/1991/15), the Executive Board called upon the UNICEF secretariat to formulate concrete plans for the contribution of UNICEF to the International Year for the World's Indigenous People, in collaboration with organizations of indigenous people, and to report on progress to the Executive Board at its 1992 session. The Board also requested the UNICEF secretariat to give particular attention, in formulating plans for the International Year, to measures for strengthening the quality and accessibility of UNICEF projects in areas inhabited by indigenous people, taking into account the relevant provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

4. Although this matter is not on the agenda of the 1992 session of the Executive Board, the Executive Director's statement to the Board regarding the plans for the Year is particularly important to indigenous people and NGOs interested in the Year.

5. In this regard, sections I, C (a) and (b) of the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/128, on activities of the United Nations system, seem particularly relevant to the work of UNICEF. In the resolution, the Assembly stressed the importance of increasing coordination, cooperation and technical assistance by the United Nations agencies and bodies for the solution of problems faced by indigenous communities in areas such as human rights, the environment, development, education and health. In that connection, it was recommended that United Nations agencies explore possible new areas of cooperation, in particular technical and financial assistance. The Assembly also stressed the need to fund concrete projects for indigenous communities, reflecting the wishes of indigenous peoples, that could have a direct benefit to the community.

6. NGOs with programmes in countries with indigenous people have a great interest in the issues listed above and in the possibility of expanding and strengthening programmes that directly benefit children in indigenous communities. Particularly relevant are articles 29 and 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the first of which says that States parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin. Article 30 says that in those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.

7. Further encouragement is found in the Declaration and Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children, which speaks of ensuring that programmes benefiting children, women and other vulnerable groups are protected in times of structural adjustments and other economic restructuring.

8. It is essential that such statements guide the development and implementation of UNICEF country programmes.

9. In resolution 46/128, the General Assembly states that indigenous people can play an important role in the planning, implementation and evaluation of projects that may affect them. The success of the Year absolutely requires the full participation of indigenous peoples themselves. The designation of a focal point and coordinator for indigenous peoples in UNICEF is strongly recommended as it will help to operationalize policies on the basis of the theme of the Year, which is a new partnership.

10. The NGO Committee on the International Year for the World's Indigenous People, 1993, will follow closely the decisions made by the Executive Board and the UNICEF secretariat regarding UNICEF commitments to indigenous people for 1993 and beyond.